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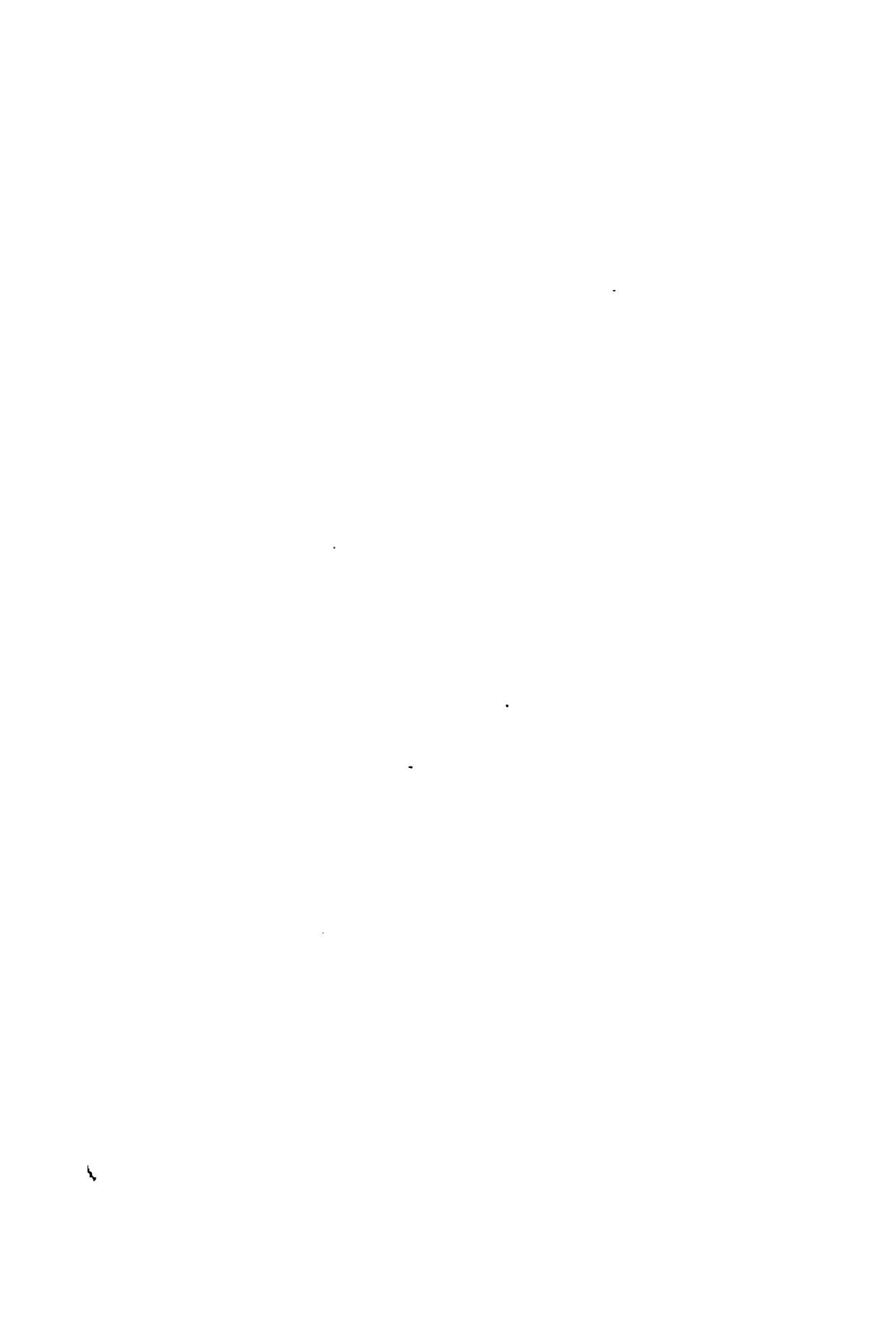
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THE
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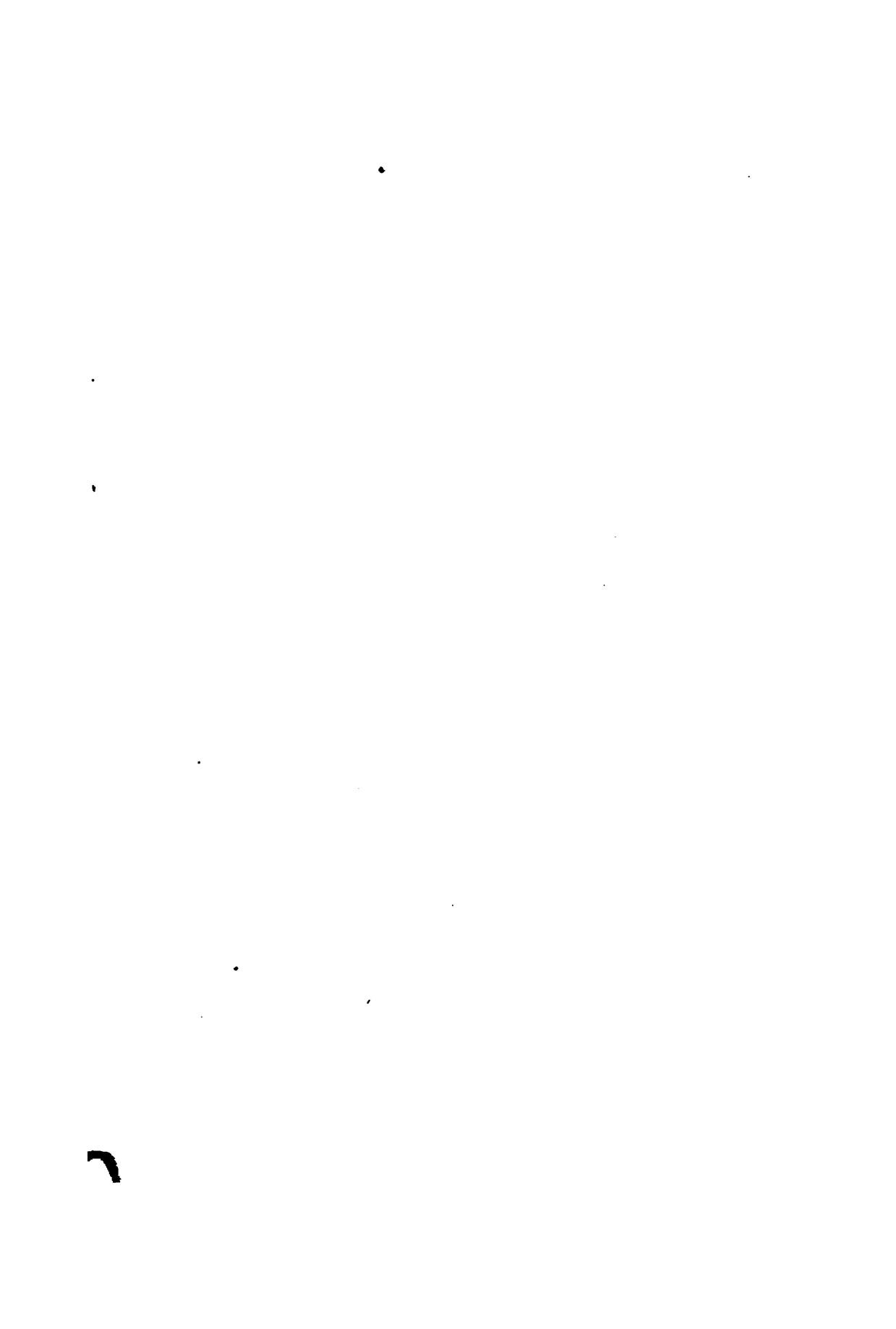
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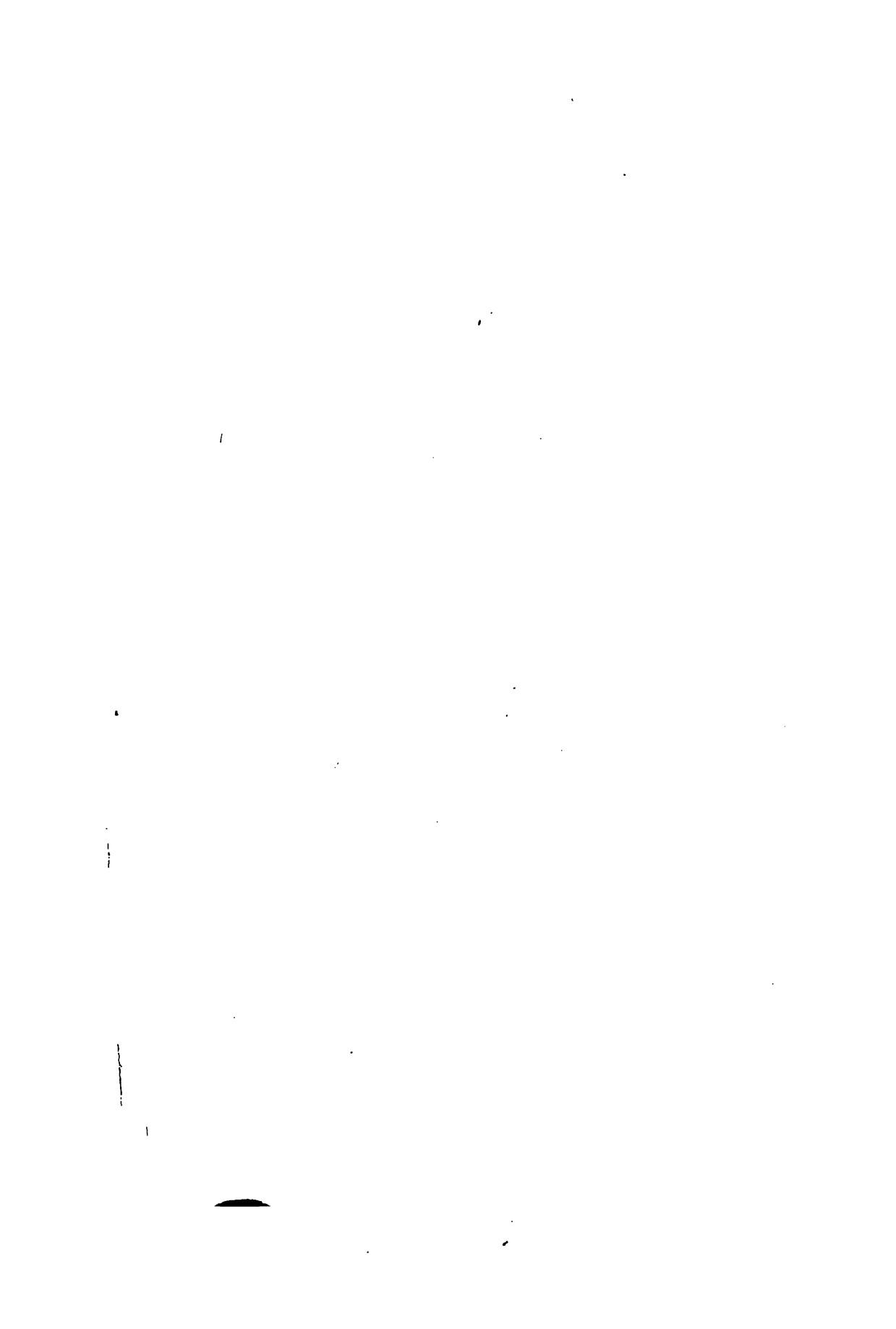
THE HERMIT OF MARLOW



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ALBION HOUSE, MARLOW, BUCKS,
SHELLEY'S RESIDENCE IN 1817.

*Fac-simile of a Woodcut published in
“The Mirror of Literature, Amusement,
and Instruction,” for Saturday the
2nd of March 1833, No. 593,
Vol. XXI, p. 129.*

THE
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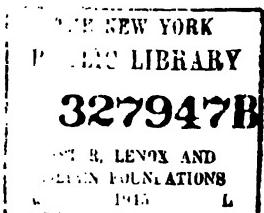
A
CHAPTER
IN THE
HISTORY OF REFORM

BY
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1887





THE HERMIT OF MARLOW, A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF REFORM.

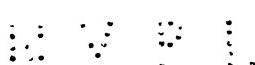
Read before the SHELLEY SOCIETY, April 13, 1887.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.—The few remarks I have to offer you this evening are intended to form an introduction to the Shelley Society's forthcoming facsimile of the poet's manuscript of his political pamphlet entitled *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote throughout the Kingdom*. The first lecture delivered to this Society after the Inaugural Address of the Rev. Stopford Brooke was one which I gave on the Vicissitudes of Queen Mab, and which was described as a chapter in the History of Reform. The same description would fit more or less nearly the paper which I read to you on the 9th of February last, concerning *The Mask of Anarchy*; and indeed many of our subjects during the next few years must perforce come within the scope of such a title. Our subject for this evening, at all events, is before all things a chapter in the History of Reform; and I fear you will not find in it even so much variety as there has been in previous chapters.

In the year 1817 the wretchedness and unrest of the lower classes in England had taken a form sufficiently marked to be the occasion of grave disquietude on the part of the government and the privileged and predatory classes, while, to the liberal-minded and tender-hearted, the need for some alleviation of a general kind

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for the wide-spread misery and oppression was fast becoming more and more visibly urgent. To make matters worse, the year 1816 had been a bad year for the farmers. There were countless mechanics and labourers who had been thrown out of work in consequence of the introduction of machinery, and the already growing power of foreign nations to compete with us in trade and manufacture. Then, as now, there were plenty of demagogues engaged in stirring up the people to rash action ; and then, as *not* now, there were government spies who earned a good living by mixing with the disaffected, inciting them to acts and utterances which could be construed into sedition or treason, and then betraying their poor dupes to the gaol or even the gallows. The people were practically unrepresented in Parliament, and were to a great extent at the mercy of those who had no mercy, the shameful Liverpool administration,—Castlereagh, Sidmouth, Eldon, and Company. Moreover, in the previous year, 1816, the working classes, ignorant though honest in the main, had been sufficiently rash and tumultuous in their agitations for reform to create a strong feeling against them in the great and powerful middle class ; and the last complete year which Shelley passed in his own country was marked by a positive decline of the cause of reform. It is true the people had still their staunch and hardy advocates of several kinds and degrees. Major Cartwright and Sir Francis Burdett and the Honourable Douglas Kinnaird were their strong and bold supporters among public men ; William Cobbett and William Hone were performing rough literary labour in the popular cause ; Leigh Hunt, whose nature fitted him better for the purlieus of dilettantedom, had thrown himself into the hurley-burley of the same cause, and was doing good work in *The Examiner* ; and there was altogether a goodly and growing “cloud of witnesses” for the rights of the people. And yet, when Shelley passed his latest Christmas at an English fire-side, the year was closing in utter blankness as to any public good which had been accomplished. The reform meetings and

petitions had for the moment failed ; an attempted interference with the legal robbery carried on by the holding of sinecures had ended in smoke ; and the popular cause was for the moment as a stream returning towards its source. It may possibly have been a perception of this retrograde tendency in the politics of his country that called into fresh and strengthened activity the reforming spirit of Shelley, and goaded him not merely to produce the two essays in concrete politics which mark the year 1817, but also to compose his largest work, that daring *Laon and Cythna* whereby he hoped to awaken the better classes of his countrymen and countrywomen from their apathy, and startle them into a moral and intellectual fermentation calculated to bring about reform in all departments, radical, sweeping, and conclusive. But I think he can hardly have perceived the retrogression so early as February, when his reform pamphlet was probably written, for at that time the great crusade that was going on in the early part of the year,—the crusade of the reform meetings held by influential people, and numberless petitions for reform addressed to the House of Commons,—had not yet failed of its object. I think he must have been urged to issue this particular pamphlet by a wise perception that some of the most prominent reformers were asking not only what it was next to impossible to grant, but what the people were not ripe to exercise—universal suffrage.

It was certainly not that he had nothing particular to do just then, no urgent personal cares to occupy him, no members of his own more intimate circle claiming help and active sympathy, no dreadful memories of recent events to harass him, and no impending disasters to struggle against. On the contrary, the year 1816 had not only seen the death of Harriett Shelley and Fanny Godwin by suicide, incidents unspeakably harrowing to him,—not only did the close of that year witness the beginning of his troubles about Harriett's children ; but the fiery planet Byron had come into the Shelleyan sphere and left him with the charge of Claire Clairmont, about to become the mother of Allegra Byron ; while Godwin, Leigh Hunt, and

Peacock, with their "large claims of general justice," were never far off.

During the first two months of 1817 Shelley was greatly occupied with preparations for the Chancery suit, which eventually deprived him definitely of the charge of Ianthe and Charles; and in January Claire's little Allegra was born at Bath, Mary Shelley being also there, and Shelley in London. Shortly Mary joined him in London; and it was seemingly during the busy time immediately preceding their settlement at Marlow that the political situation appeared to him so pressing as to call forth *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote throughout the Kingdom*: it was apparently while the Chancery suit was still pending; for the pamphlet came out about the middle of March, and Lord Eldon's decision on the suit was not given till the 27th.

The house which Shelley had taken at Marlow, to occupy "for ever" with Mary and her child, if not with Claire and the little Allegra and many regular or desultory camp-followers, bore the propitious name of "Albion House." The household migrated to Marlow "in the last week in February," says Professor Dowden,¹ "before the house was ready." Shelley was back in London before taking possession, and finally "seems to have entered the house in the week March 9—16."² This perpetual residence was secured, it seems, just in time to yield a pseudonym for the poet, who was then suffering keenly from the baleful effects of two early works filed by the Westbrooks in the Court of Chancery, in support of allegations made to deprive him of the custody of his children. The fact that *Queen Mab* and the *Letter to Lord Ellenborough* had been used against him, though with results not then disclosed, may have influenced him to conceal his authorship of the reform pamphlet; for, though moderate compared with much writing of the period on the Liberal side, the *Proposal* was still sufficiently daring, and would, in the eyes of Lord Eldon, the Westbrooks, and other magnates and nobodies, have added to his religious and social enormities a definite

¹ *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii, p. 110.

² *Ibid.*

attempt at political agitation. For whatever reason, he elected to place upon the pamphlet no author's name, and to let it go out to the world as from "The Hermit of Marlow,"—a designation which it pleased him to keep during the greater part of his residence in that primitive Buckinghamshire town on the banks of the Thames, though it must be confessed that "Albion House," albeit not then cut up into tenements and turned in part into a public-house as it is now, was not in any respect like a hermitage. It stood, as it stands to-day, right on the roadside (West Street is the name of the road; but it is still not much like a street); and solitude was not a marked characteristic of the conditions of residence at Marlow. Whether Shelley's friends knew him in 1817 as "The Hermit," I cannot say; but he himself brought out the title for use again in November, when he issued his second political pamphlet of 1817, ostensibly *An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte*, but really an eloquent appeal against the iniquitous execution of Brandreth, Turner, and Ludlam, the victims of the government spy Oliver and one of those bogus conspiracies which were an ugly feature of the anti-popular tactics in those days of "Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy."

But to return to the Hermit's first Marlow pamphlet,—the same good fortune which, as we shall see anon, attended the scheme of reform there advocated, attended also the tangible substance incorporating that scheme,—that is to say if preservation is to be regarded as a thing to be desired. Unlike the Hermit's other pamphlet, of which no manuscript, or proof-sheet, or copy of the original issue is known to be extant, the *Proposal* is preserved in all three stages. Not only have copies of the extremely rare print come down to us, but the proof-sheets revised by Shelley, and bearing sketchy drawings from his pen, were preserved by Leigh Hunt, and are now in the collection of Sir Percy and Lady Shelley; while the manuscript sent to the printer, roughly and rapidly written, full of erasures and corrections, and probably the only copy written out by Shelley, remained in the hands of Mr. Ollier, the publisher, whose family, in

the fulness of time, sold it. This took place in July 1877 ; and I refrain now from any textual examination of the manuscript, because Mr. Francis Harvey of St. James's Street, who bought this holograph at auction in the ordinary way of business, gave me, with exemplary courtesy and generosity, full opportunity to, exhaust the subject when I reprinted the pamphlet in my edition of Shelley's *Prose Works* (4 volumes, 1880). I believe the foot-notes to the *Proposal* give all that can be given in the way of variorum readings and cancelled passages ; and it is a pleasure to me to think that Mr. Harvey, of whom I had no previous knowledge, and on whom I certainly had no claim, entertained an angel unawares. Not that I ever was an angel, or expect ever to be one ; but it was the record of the particulars of the manuscript in my notes that eventually found Mr. Harvey a customer for his costly treasure in the person of Mr. Wise, who has allowed it to be facsimile'd for the Shelley Society's Extra Series.

But the luck of preservation connected with the *Proposal* goes further yet. As far as I know, there is but one reference to the Princess Charlotte pamphlet in all the extant Shelley correspondence. Mrs. Shelley's diary records that he began a pamphlet on the 11th of November and finished it on the 12th ; and there is a little note to Ollier, dated the 12th, sending a part of the manuscript for press.¹ These are doubtless references to the *Address* ; but in the case of the *Proposal* we have Shelley's instructions to his publisher in some detail. The following letter is undated, un-post-marked, and, I believe, unpublished :—

DEAR SIR,

I inclose you the Revise which may be put to press when corrected, and the sooner the better. I inclose you also a list of persons to whom I wish copies to be sent *from the Author*, as soon as possible. I trust you will be good enough to take the trouble off my hands.—

¹ Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii, p. 158.

Do not advertise sparingly: and get as many book-sellers as you can to take copies on their own account. Sherwood Neely & Co, Hone of Newgate Street, Ridgeway, and Stockdale are people likely to do so —Send 20 or 30 copies to Messrs. Hookham & Co Bond Street without explanation. I have arranged with them.

Send 20 copies to me addressed to Mr. Hunt, who will know what to do with them if I am out of town.—

Your very obedient Ser^t

P. B. SHELLEY

The list which Shelley sent to Mr. Ollier in the foregoing letter was a pretty considerable one, designed to dispose of fifty-seven copies of the pamphlet, besides the forty or fifty referred to in the letter; and the instructions as to advertizing and so on indicate regular publication. According to entries made on the list, thirty-one copies were sent out "from the Author." A copy also appears to have reached either Southey or *The Quarterly Review*; for in the heading to his article on "The Rise and Progress of Popular Disaffection,"¹ the title of Shelley's pamphlet figures, though the *Proposal* is not alluded to in the text of the article. On the whole the pamphlet ought not to be so extremely rare; and the Shelley Society will probably stir up hiding-holes and bring copies to light.

In another extant letter to Mr. Ollier, written at Marlow on the 14th of March 1817, the Hermit asks "How does the pamphlet sell?" Of the answer we know nothing; but it was probably the negative to which he was already well accustomed; and in this case the incongruity between the bold title and the shy retiring pseudonym might not unnaturally have deterred from purchase even the very elect of reformers.

When one wants to form an idea of the influences working from without, at a particular time, on a man vitally interested as Shelley was in the progress of

¹ *Quarterly* for January 1817, published the following April.

public affairs, it is no bad plan, leisure permitting, to consult a file of some contemporary daily newspaper and the relative volumes of Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*. In default of leisure or opportunity for bringing this cumbrous apparatus to bear on the present subject, I will ask you to accompany me in imagination while I turn over the leaves of a weekly newspaper of 1817 instead; and how can we do better than take Leigh Hunt's ultra-radical print, *The Examiner*, with its audacious "Leontian" leaders, its excellent parliamentary and other reports, and its varied and multitudinous notes of news? Moreover, this paper for 1817 is not unembellished by the genius of many of the Shelley circle; and it is a pleasure to glance over pages in which we are conscious of the presence of Leigh Hunt *passim*, stumble upon sonnets by Keats, meet once and again Haydon and Hazlitt, fall in with dear delightful Horace Smith, and even get a taste of the quality of Shelley himself, who was a contributor of Hunt's as well as a constant reader.

Before we take to our *Examiner*, it will be worth while to glance down that list of persons to whom Shelley ordered his publishers to send the *Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote*. This list is printed in *The Shelley Library*, Part I, page 67; but I will read it to you now, because it includes the names of most of the persons marked by liberal views on whose track we shall presently come in our radical newspaper. The list is as follows:—

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Sir Francis Burdett M.P.* | Lord Cochrane M.P. |
| Mr. Peters of Cornwall | Sir R. Heron M.P. |
| Mr. Brougham M.P.* | The Lord Mayor* |
| Lord Grosvenor* | Mr. Montague Burgoyne |
| Lord Holland* | Major Cartwright* |
| Lord Grey* | Messrs. Taylor Sen. & Jun. of Norwich |
| Mr. Cobbett* | Mr. Place, Charing Cross* |
| Mr. Waithman* | Mr. Walker of Westminster |
| Mr. Curran | Lord Essex* |
| Hon. Douglas Kinnaird* | Capt. Bennet M.P.* |
| Hon. Thos. Brand M.P.* | |

| | |
|--|---|
| The Birmingham Hampden Club (5 copies) | The Editors of the Statesman * the Morning Chronicle * and the Independent Whig * |
| Mr. I. Thomas, St. Albans, Mon. | Mr. Montgomery (the Poet) of Sheffield |
| Mr. Philipps, Whitston, Mon. | Mr. R. Oven of Lanark |
| Mr. Andrew Duncan, Provost of Arbroath | Mr. Madocks M.P. |
| Mr. Alderman Goodbehere * | Mr. George Ensor |
| Mr. Jones Burdett * | Mr. Bruce |
| Mr. Hallet of Berkshire (5 copies) | Mr. Sturch (of Westminster) * |
| The London Hampden Club (10 copies) * | Mr. Creery M.P. |
| | Genl. Sir R. Ferguson M.P.* |

Against some of these names, distinguished by asterisks, the word *sent* was written in the original list, and not by Shelley. I presume this was done at Messrs. Ollier's office, and that copies were really sent to the persons thus indicated.

To turn, now, to our *Examiner*,—the year opens propitiously for us ; for on New Year's Day the patriarchal reformer Major Cartwright took the chair at a meeting of the Westminster Electors at the Crown and Anchor, convened to receive from their popular and gallant representative in Parliament, Lord Cochrane, his answer to an address which they had voted him in assurance of their continued confidence and admiration. Lord Cochrane's manly reply alludes to the support and protection he has had from liberal Westminster during three years of persecution for those well-known attacks on naval abuses to which his position in the navy had given the sting of truth. "After many strong and interesting statements," says the report, "he recommended to the Meeting to continue to support Parliamentary Reform, for without it the people of England would remain oppressed, persecuted, enslaved, and starving." In the course of the proceedings a Mr. Wells was hissed for proposing so weak a measure of reform as triennial parliaments : he explained that he really wanted annual ones, but thought "if that object could not be obtained, it were better to go step by step until they could obtain it." A Mr. Walker,

doubtless the gentleman of that suggestive name mentioned in Shelley's "free list," remarked that he "was for arriving at the wished-for object at once"; and then the redoubted Major delivered his conviction that triennial parliaments could not be beneficial if obtained. He mentioned as evidence of the exertions then being made that he had five hundred petitions in his house to present at the meeting of Parliament, and had issued three hundred more forms to be filled up: he named 2,400 as the total number of petitions likely to be presented; and he concluded by emphatically stating that annual representation was the only cure for existing evils.

Five days after this meeting in Westminster, Shelley may, for anything I can hear to the contrary, have attended a huge meeting at Bath. Claire was certainly in that city; and Shelley and Mary had secured places in the coach, for the 1st of January, to join her: it was still early in January when he left the two ladies at Bath, to return to London on his Chancery business; and if, as I think, he was at Bath on the 6th, he would hardly have missed the occasion to attend a meeting of upwards of 6,000 people to petition Parliament for a redress of grievances and particularly for parliamentary reform. On this momentous occasion "large bodies of military, both horse and foot, were in readiness in case of a riot; and most of the principal inhabitants were sworn in special constables on the occasion," when "Orator" Hunt was "to the fore," and made a long speech in his usual rough and ready, pugnacious style, specially condemning the attempt of the authorities to intimidate the assembly.

Turning the page again, we find our *Examiner* recording that four sailors, on the day after this meeting, were hung for stealing ships; and here was another call for reform which must have seemed desperately urgent to our tender-hearted and tolerant poet.

To *The Examiner* for the 10th of January he contributed his *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, of which, by the by, I am pretty sure he must have revised a proof; and immediately after his signature comes the

word REFORM at the head of a report of a "Select Meeting of Independent Gentlemen, friends of economy, public order, and reform,"—which had been held on the 17th of January. The most prominent names on this occasion are those of Curran, Alderman Waithman, and Alderman Goodbehere, names which, you will remember, are all in Shelley's list of persons to whom his pamphlet was to go. Curran made a capital speech, wherein he remarked that parliamentary reform did not "consist in breaking windows or getting drunk in the streets,"—a remark not wholly inapplicable to some of the so-called reformers of our own day.

The report of this meeting is followed by one of a meeting held at Dublin on the previous Monday, the 13th of January, under the eye, as one of the speakers (O'Connell) observed, "of ten regiments of soldiers under arms, and two troops of artillery ready for immediate action." This meeting, described as "a vast concourse of people," dispersed and "returned in the greatest order to their homes," after passing several resolutions, and agreeing to a thoroughly representative petition, the terms of which must, I think, have been familiar to Shelley.

This petition set forth that the House of Commons did not, in any constitutional or rational sense, represent the Nation; that, when the people have ceased to be represented, the constitution is subverted; that taxation without representation is a state of slavery; that there is no property in that which can be taken from the people without their consent; that these ills could only be remedied by the election of a free Parliament; and that the substitution of the system of corrupt usurpation of popular rights for genuine representation was to blame for the state of permanent poverty and distress inflicted on Ireland by the Legislative Union. The petitioners therefore prayed for popular representation coextensive with taxation, for equal distribution of seats, and for annual elections.

Proceeding with our *Examiner*, we find that, the day after this Petition was adopted at Dublin, a boy whose

patronymic was Dogood, but who was evidently regarded by those in authority as a "ne'er-do-well," was sent to prison in London for tearing down some bills posted in Long Acre, headed "Mr. Hunt hissed out of Bristol." The animus of the authorities against the "Orator" and the cause he represented is obvious.

On the 22nd of January another reform meeting took place at the Crown and Anchor,—William Cobbett, Henry Hunt, and Major Cartwright being the most prominent speakers. Mr. Jones Burdett (another of the gentlemen of Shelley's "free list,") brought word from the London Hampden Club that he and Major Cartwright were deputed by that Club to lay before the Reform Delegates assembled at the meeting the heads of a bill to be submitted to Parliament. The material principles recognized by this bill were (1) household suffrage, (2) division of counties and cities into electoral districts, each returning one member, according to population, and (3) annual elections. Major Cartwright said that, though in favour of universal suffrage, he must admit that many "sound reformists entertained other opinions on the ground of practicability." Cobbett spoke most contemptuously of the Club, but excepted from his denunciation Sir Francis Burdett, Mr. Jones Burdett, Major Cartwright, and "that sound patriot Mr. Hallet of Berks." It is worth while to note in passing that this same gentleman, "Mr. Hallet of Berkshire," was to receive five copies of the Reform pamphlet according to Shelley's list, and that the London Hampden Club was to receive ten. I suppose "Berkshire," was not a sufficiently definite address for Mr. Ollier, no copies having apparently been sent to Mr. Hallet. Henry Hunt, while endorsing Cobbett's contemptuous view of the Club, managed to carry, against him, a resolution in favour of "representation co-existent with taxation." A skirmish between the "Orator" and the reporters of *The Morning Chronicle* and *The British Press* gave variety to the proceedings: Hunt, always in hot water, accused the daily press of systematic

misrepresentation of reform meetings ; and the two reporters resented the insult and denied the charge.

One day later (23 January 1817) Alderman Goodbehere and Alderman Waithman took a prominent part in a reform meeting of the Common Council of London, at which the resolutions were very significant and well drawn.

The Court resolved to lay before Parliament a representation tracing almost all the ills that flesh is heir to back to a long course of extravagance in the expenditure of the public money—to a profusion of useless places, sinecures, and unmerited pensions—to an enormous and unnecessary standing army in time of peace—and to the want of that vigilance and constitutional control over the executive government, which can only spring from a free, equal, and pure representation of the people in Parliament. They determined to point out that the decay of trade, manufactures, and agriculture, the depreciation in the value of property, and the enormous and vexatious weight of taxation, whereby a large portion of the population were compelled to seek charity, or to take refuge in a workhouse, had chiefly arisen from the corrupt and inadequate state of the representation, and that all attempts at remedy, without reform in Parliament, would prove delusive ; that as extravagance and corruption in governments had been the destruction of all free States, so it was impossible that a system, which had proved fatal to other States, should be innocently pursued in this ; and that it was essential to the public welfare to shorten the duration of parliaments, bring about a fair and equal distribution of the elective franchise among all freeholders, copyholders, and householders paying taxes, and enforce such regulations as would preserve the purity and integrity of the Members, and render the House of Commons an efficient organ of the people.

The Court of Common Council therefore resolved that petitions should be presented to Parliament, for the abolition of all sinecures and unmerited pensions, the reduction of the enormous standing army, the es-

tablishment of a general system of retrenchment and economy, and such a reform in the Commons House of Parliament as would restore to the people their just and fair weight in the legislature.

Turning to other parts of our *Examiner* for the 26th of January, we come on some occult allusions of Leigh Hunt's to Shelley's Chancery case, and on an inaccurate little report, taken from *The Morning Chronicle*, of the proceedings on Friday the 24th of January in the matter of Westbrook *v.* Shelley. "His Lordship is to give judgment on a future day," says the report. On the same page begins the report of the trial of a sailor named Cashman and others in the matter of the musket-stealing connected with certain riots of historic note which had taken place two months earlier. Cashman was found guilty and condemned to death.

On the 28th of January the Prince Regent opened Parliament: on his way back to the palace he got hooted and pelted; and the windows of his carriage were broken. On the following Sunday *The Examiner* was of course full of the attack and the opening of Parliament. On the 29th Lord Cochrane began the reform petition campaign by presenting a petition from Bristol signed by over 50,000 people; and, after a full parliamentary report, we find in *The Examiner* for the 2nd of February, in an appropriate setting of reform paragraphs, an editorial correction of inaccuracies in the report of Westbrook *v.* Shelley, immediately followed by Horace Smith's sonnet, commencing with the line

"Eternal and Omnipotent Unseen!"

Shelley's battle to regain possession of his children was of course regarded in his immediate circle not only as a personal question of desperate interest, but as an important issue in the general question of fundamental reform. The issue was indeed momentous—being no less than a dispute as to the right of a father, of what opinions soever in religious, moral, and social questions, to control and educate his own children. Note that in this, as in most of the reform battles fought in the reign of Eldon, Castlereagh, Sidmouth and Co., the

popular party, the party of freedom and equal laws, failed grievously and utterly.

But we must keep to our *Examiner* a little longer.

On the 3rd of February, as reported in the paper of the 9th, the reform petitions to Parliament were varied by one from the boy Dogood, who had been sent to prison for tearing down scurrilous posters about "Orator" Hunt. That petition was rejected; and the boy was referred to the Law Courts.

Sir Francis Burdett and Lord Cochrane now appear in constant collision with Lord Castlereagh, Mr. Vansittart, or some one else of the kind,—every petition brought forward being subjected to obstruction, and Brougham frequently rising to put in a pregnant word for the petitioners.

The *Examiner* of the 10th of January has the agreeable variety of a sonnet from Keats, that to Kosciusko, flanked by reports of Henry Hunt's vulgarity at a reform meeting and of a discreditable fracas between him and Morley the hotel keeper. Perhaps this blundering coarseness, which was characteristic enough of the "Orator," prevented Shelley from sending him the pamphlet: at all events his name is conspicuous for its absence from the list, though two years later, *apropos* of "Peterloo," Shelley commended his conduct. The same day's paper has a report of a meeting in Palace Yard, Westminster, on the 13th of February, to vote an address of the inhabitants of Westminster to the Regent concerning the attack on his carriage. As usual, Sir Francis Burdett, Major Cartwright, Lord Cochrane, and Henry Hunt were in the van. The address voted was a clever, sarcastic document, really, with mock humility, making light of the attack, and inculcating on his royal highness the urgent need for reform.

From *The Examiner* for the 23rd of February we gather in passing that, at that time, seventy-three men and fifteen women were lying under sentence of death in Newgate gaol. A Mr. Bennet used this fact for an indirect attack in Parliament on Lord Eldon; and Lord Castlereagh "deemed the Hon. gentleman's speech very inflammatory, and directed against high legal officers. 'The delay,'" he

said, "did not rest with the Chancellor." Mr. Bennet's object seems to have been to force the Chancellor and the Secretary of State to prepare a list of these wretched people for the Prince Regent, with a view of getting their miseries abridged either one way or another. It appears there was hope that the majority would not really suffer the penalty of death. The only Member of Parliament of the name of Bennet that I can trace in 1817 is the Hon. H. G. Bennet. Shelley's list includes Captain Bennet, M.P., to whom a copy of the pamphlet seems to have been sent ; and I suppose this was the gentleman who had attacked Lord Eldon. Turning from the disgraceful business which was the subject of his attack to another page of the paper, we find relief (and let us hope Shelley did) in Keats's sonnet

" After dark vapors have oppress'd our plains" . . .

One more leaf turned, and we meet "Orator" Hunt in the Court of King's Bench before Shelley's old bugbear Lord Ellenborough, urging, but without any satisfactory result, the case of the boy Dogood, whom Parliament had referred to the Law Courts.

The accounts of reform meetings, and of the proceedings in Parliament about the petitions occupy a great deal of space in *The Examiner*. We know that Shelley was a regular reader of the paper ; and the chances are that he read every word of what we have been glancing at, and a vast deal more on these subjects. The petition phenomenon seems to have struck Mrs. Shelley ; for, in a letter to Leigh Hunt inviting him to Marlow, she says, " You shall never be serious when you wish to be merry, and have as many nuts to crack as there are words in the Petitions to Parliament for Reform—a tremendous promise."¹

Now Shelley's small contribution to this reform agitation is a really practical and not impracticable one. Seeing how the contest raged in Parliament, how little real impression on that corrupt chamber and insolently

¹ Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii, p. 112.

unprincipled administration was being produced by the fiery onslaughts of Sir Francis Burdett, the frank and gallant pertinacity of Lord Cochrane, the logical incisiveness of Henry Brougham, the cool, consistent, decisive hammering of Major Cartwright, at the close of his forty years' experience in popular agitation ; seeing behind the parliamentary spectacle the great surging ocean of misery and agitation ; and hearing the repeated question, "*Is* parliamentary reform the will of the people,"—he said "Let us see." How? By taking the sense of the people.

The object of Shelley's pamphlet was to hold a meeting in order to organize a deliberate *plébiscite*, and to abide by the result. If reform should prove to be the will of the majority, Parliament must grant it or be deemed in rebellion against the people. If only a minority demanded reform, it would rest with them to go on petitioning till they attained their end by attraction and accretion.

Not only was this proposal for a meeting at the Crown and Anchor tavern a reasonable and practicable one ; but the Hermit was ready to give a tenth of his year's income towards the expenses of the *plébiscite*. Moreover, he expressed surprisingly moderate views. Major Cartwright's position in claiming universal suffrage he admitted to be logically impregnable ; but he also pointed out that, logically, the preëminent advantages of a republic could not be disputed. He did not think England ripe either for republican government or for universal suffrage, because the men of the lowest class had been rendered "brutal and torpid and ferocious by ages of slavery." He therefore thought that "none but those who register their names as paying a certain small sum in *direct taxes* ought, at present, to send members to Parliament." As to annual elections, he endorsed unhesitatingly the views of Cartwright and Cobbett.

In the long run, Shelley's reputation had the advantage proper to the moderate and sagacious tone of this pamphlet ; for, as Mr. Rossetti says, at page 80 of his Memoir of the poet, "The whirligig of time has brought in many revenges to Shelley, and this amongst others—that the Tories found it their interest and necessity to

pass in 1867 almost the very scheme of Reform which the poet and 'dreamer,' the atheist and democrat, had suggested in 1817; for it makes little difference whether we speak of a payment of money in 'direct taxes' or in 'rating.' We may not unprofitably note another of Time's revenges: a great poet in 1817 advocates a scheme of reform carried out by the Conservatives in 1867; and then an admirable poet still among us characterizes the year, the deed, and the men, especially the late Lord Beaconsfield, thus:—

"In the Year of the great Crime,
When the false English nobles and their Jew,
By God demented, slew
The Trust they stood thrice pledged to keep from wrong, . . ."¹

This trust, you will observe, was the enslavement of the people. Meanwhile, passing by the measure of reform wrung by pressure of circumstances from "the false English nobles and their Jew," we may profitably bear in mind that the leading ideas of that gallant Major whom Shelley regarded as unanswerable, and who was one of the most influential politicians of his land and day, still await fulfilment. Indeed, although the rushing wheels of our civilizing machine are fast driving out of any living place in our memory men whose work, like that of Cartwright and Burdett, is not of a form and visible substance to command integral preservation, I cannot leave John Cartwright without a few more words.

It is difficult for us to realize at the present day the importance of the position which he occupied in 1817, as well as earlier and later. When Shelley wrote his *Proposal*, the mere reference to Major Cartwright was sufficient to carry with it four clear and very advanced ideas, to wit, universal suffrage, equal representation, vote by ballot, and annual parliaments: it was as the "firm, consistent, and persevering advocate" of those principles that he was described at the base of a statue of him erected in Burton Crescent just before the Reform Bill of 1832 was passed. This was under

¹ (*Odes*, by COVENTRY PATMORE, 1868.)

the administration of Earl Grey, who was an old adherent to the principles of Major Cartwright, however much it may have been found expedient to water down those principles in the work of 1832, so as to give the power to the middle class and not to the people.

This "firm, consistent, and persevering advocate" of righteous views, whereof some yet await fulfilment, had been a genuine force in England: born far back in the eighteenth century, his eventful and philanthropic life was drawing to its close when Shelley became convinced of the need to retrench those magnificent schemes of reform. They were good men, these Cartwrights: the Major was brother to that Edmund Cartwright who invented the power-loom; and another brother, George, was the intrepid navigator who made six voyages to the coast of Labrador, passed in all nearly sixteen years there, and published in 1793, in three quarto volumes, a *Journal of Transactions and Events* during that long residence in an inhospitable country.

As for Major Cartwright, we should do well to remember that his *Reasons for Reformation*, published in 1809, and another book issued a year later, entitled *The Comparison, in which Mock Reform, Half Reform, and Constitutional Reform, are considered*, were familiar far and wide in 1817, and that they had succeeded a long array of political pamphlets, treatises, and essays; so that Shelley would doubtless have thought it as impertinent as it was unnecessary to particularize the views and arguments to which he alludes in *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote*. That *Proposal*, sagacious and sound as it is, was a poor little tract compared with Cartwright's achievements, the whole tale of which the world has quietly relegated to the dust-bin of oblivion. But we must take the world as we find it; and the world will take into account, even in appraising this pamphlet, the splendour of Shelley's intellectual and literary gifts, the wonder of what he wrought in verse and of all that vast apocalyptic golden age that he saw spreading landscape-like beyond his day, beyond our day. More, even, than these things, perhaps, the fascination of his unique personality, makes it natural for us to attempt to gather,

investigate, and illustrate all he ever did. But the true, honest men who only worked hard for the enfranchisement of their less fortunate fellow men, only gave their lives, their hearts, their heads, and their energies, must be deemed fortunate if allowed even to sit on the lowest steps of the temple of fame, while the upper steps are reserved for the men of genius, some of whom are already beginning to be crowded and jostled out of the inner sanctum.



London :
Printed by Richard Clay & Sons, *Bread Street Hill.*
April, 1887.





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